

Agricultural Extension in Kazakhstan

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Master's Thesis • 30 HEC

Environmental Communication and Management - Master's Programme

Uppsala 2014

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Communication

Credits: 30 HEC

Level: Second cycle (A2E)

Course title: Independent Project in Environmental Sciences - Master's thesis

Course code: EX0431

Programme/Education: Environmental Communication and Management – Master's Programme

Place of publication: Uppsala

Year of publication: 2014

Cover picture: View from step in Zarechnyi village, Kazakhstan. Photo by Gulmira Andirova

Maps and/or images: The relevance model by U. Nitsch (2000) published with permission of the author from 15.04.2014; a map of distribution of Extension Development Departments. Source:

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Online publication: <http://stud.epsilon.slu.se>

Keywords: agricultural extension, environmental communication, perspective, symbolic interaction

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the project of Erasmus Mundus Action 2 “Central Asia Student International Academic exchange with EU” for selecting and giving me such a unique opportunity to study in Sweden.

I also take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the Department of Rural and Urban Development, Division of Environmental Communication, for the very good organization of their educational process and support throughout the programme.

My special thanks go to all informants and organizations who kindly shared their experiences and valuable information with me during my fieldwork in Kazakhstan.

I would like to thank my beloved parents for always believing in me in my important decisions. Thanks to all my classmates of the Environmental Communication Management programme for their support, encouragement and funniest moments of our friendship.

The knowledge and experience I have gained from the Environmental Communication and Management master programme at SLU will help me to provide quality communication strategies and practice to environmental sustainability and natural resource management in my country of Kazakhstan.

Gulmira Andirova

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the communication and perception between the Extension Development Department and the farmers working in the Kostanay region of Kazakhstan. The agricultural extension program was introduced to the Kostanay region in 2009 after privatization reform. Most of the agricultural lands have been privatized by the rural people. The thesis is based on six interviews with the officers from the Extension Development Department and the farmers of the Kostanay region. The semi-structured interviews are used for data collection. Models of environmental communication and theory of Symbolic Interactionism has been used to analyze the findings. The research uncovered that there are difficulties in the communication process due to poor infrastructure in the villages, the communication on an irregular basis, farmer's passiveness and not taking the role of others. Some recommendations on how to improve the communication process and relationship between the extension officers and the farmers of the Kostanay region are given such as developing the human resources, developing infrastructure and changing the farmers' and extension officers attitudes towards new technologies and innovations.

Key words: agricultural extension, environmental communication, perspective, symbolic interaction.

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ABBREVIATIONS

JSC	Joint Stock Company
LLC	Limited Liability Company
MA	Ministry of Agriculture
EDD	Extension Development Department

1. INTRODUCTION

For many decades agriculture all over the world has benefitted from extension programs. In the recently privatized agricultural sector in Kazakhstan efficient extension has played an important role to ensure sustainable development. This thesis studies the conditions for agricultural extension in one region of Kazakhstan.

The Republic of Kazakhstan is a rich country in its resources of oil and gas which are considered the most significant contributors to the national economy, as well as exported wheat (seventh largest producer of wheat in the world), textiles, livestock, and uranium. The agricultural sector composes nearly 6 percent of the GDP. Agricultural land accounts for about 23 million hectares, 68 percent of which is pasture and hay land. Dairy goods, leather, meat, and wool are the main livestock products (Global Forum for Rural Advisory Service, 2013).

The proper organization of farm management, the implementation of advanced agricultural technologies and the science-based methods are the key factors in the development of the agricultural sector. In this circumstance, the extension system plays an important role to increase the effectiveness of agricultural enterprises. The creation of the system of sharing knowledge in agriculture is based on the model of the extension system which is widely spread in the world and is considered as the most effective instrument to integrate the work of research institutions and businesses in agriculture (JSC, KazAgroInn, 2013).

Being a post soviet country, Kazakhstan has also experienced the distribution of previously state-owned farms. Most of the new farm owners have no previous experience in management of private farming. Due to lack of proper extension services in the country, all categories of new farm owners have been facing difficulties in running their private farms. Kazakhstan does not yet have a comprehensive extension service in agriculture although the government has been trying to establish it after the collapse of the Soviet Union (GFRAS, 2013).

The head of state, President N. Nazarbayev, highlighted three main areas of agricultural development: increasing productivity through the introduction of new technologies and the growth of agricultural raw materials; ensuring the food security of the country; and implementation of the export potential in the agricultural sector (Address of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan N.Nazarbayev to the nation, Astana, January 29, 2010). To implement these main tasks the Government decided to improve the competence of agricultural producers through the dissemination of scientific knowledge, practical skills and advanced technologies. Such work hadn't been carried out in the country. In Soviet times, commercial agriculture was carried out by large formations - collective farms and state farms (Kolkhoz¹ and Sovkhoz²). For such collective farms there was a well organized system of training, mainly the extension service was created on the basis of specialized secondary and higher educational institutions.

In 1995, the Kazakh government launched a new agricultural reform. The majority of agricultural enterprises were privatized and the old system of agribusiness management and extension service had been changed. As a result, the agricultural production, especially in livestock, which 80 percent was spread out among private farms of rural population, saw a sharp

¹ A collective farm in the former Soviet Union, a cooperative agricultural enterprise operated in a state- owned by peasants from a number of households who belonged to the collective and who were paid as salaried employees on the basis of quality and quantity of labor contributed (from the Encyclopedia Britannica).

² A state-operated enterprise in the U.S.S.R organized according to the industrial principles for specialized large-scale production (from Encyclopaedia Britannica).

decrease in the participation of qualified professionals. For example, in 1990, in Kazakhstan, there were about 5000 agricultural enterprises, and after privatization reform in 2009 there were more than 175,000 big and small scale farms. Most of these new categories of farms are not able to afford the maintenance of qualified specialists and can't carry out quality inspections in their farms due to economic or cultural reasons. Therefore, it is necessary to use the experience of sharing knowledge among farmers and develop the cooperation of science and business in the agricultural sector. The Ministry of Agriculture (MA) is responsible for providing public extension services to the farmers in the country. The Ministry carries out this function through the KazAgroInnovation, which is a joint stock company (JSC). The company gets its total funding from the government and is considered a semi-autonomous body. The company is specialized in the extension service in the country and is responsible for the development of innovations and new technologies in the agricultural sector (JSC KazAgroInn, 2013).

2. PROBLEM FORMULATION

There are six big extension centres in the country created under the supervision of the Ministry of Agriculture and JSC KazAgroInnovation. Research about the extension service in the Kostanay region, particularly the Extension Development Department in LLC³ Zarechnoe experimental station, was carried out to understand how the farmers experience the extension service and how they practice the extension in the region. LLC Zarechnoe experimental station coordinates the work of local private farms and performs the agricultural extension service in the region. The main aim of this centre is to provide the scientific knowledge and advanced agricultural technologies to increase the competitiveness and effectiveness of production in agriculture (LLC Zarechnoe experimental station, 2013).

The new extension services and centres were created in the year 2007 through 2009, and continue to develop the current agricultural extension program in Kazakhstan. During the privatization reform many agricultural properties were privatized to people without agricultural education and many of them failed in running their business. In recent years, people are migrating to the city from the village, leaving behind their agricultural businesses. The purpose of the extension centres are to teach rural people how to practice farming and provide them with advisory and extension services since most of the farmers are not aware of proper fertilizer doses or new technologies, like soil protective moisture or energy saving technologies. As a result farmers still use traditional methods of cultivating lands and face a lot of environmental problems related to agriculture. Due to the recent implementation of the Extension program and creation of the Extension Development Department the extension service in itself is a new activity in Kazakhstan. The privatization of farm enterprises is a new phenomenon as well. Therefore, in these circumstances, it is very important to study the communication between farmers and the Extension Development Department in the region.

³ Limited Liability Company – a legal form of enterprise that compounds elements of partnerships and corporate structures.

2.1 Aim and research questions.

The aim of the study is to understand how the farmers experience the extension service, how communication and extension service is carried out in the Kostanay region, and to explore the extension officers' perception of their work. In order to reach this aim I will investigate how the communication takes place between the extension officers and the farmers, and what problems these actors perceive with the way the extension service is currently carried out. Taking into account the aims of this research work, the following questions will be identified:

1. How is the extension service carried out in this region?
2. How do the extension officers perceive their work? What problems do they see and how are they dealing with them?
3. How do the farmers experience the extension service?

3. METHODOLOGY

The research work involves the understanding of how the local farmers experience the extension service and how it is carried out in the region. Semi-structured interviews were used as the method for data collection of this research work. The questions were open-ended and followed by interview guide⁴ with a list of topics (Bernard, 2011:158). The interviews were conducted with two groups of people: the office workers of the EDD⁵ (LLC Zarechnoe experimental station) and local farmers (the Kostanay region). With the help of semi-structured interviews this thesis aims to understand how the actors communicate and how the extension service is carried out in the region. The semi-structured interviews were chosen to help uncover key issues and create new questions to be analyzed both by my perspective and the actors' perspectives. Semi-structured interviews require a set of instructions to be sure not to forget to ask important questions and to manage the time with the interviewee who it may be difficult to meet and talk with again (ibid, 2011:158). At the beginning of the research work there were some difficulties in contacting EDD due to bureaucratic issues and I had to demonstrate that I was fully prepared for the interviewing and competent in my subject. Therefore, semi-structured interviewing is very useful tool in projects to help manage working with authority figures who use their working time efficiently (ibid, 2011:158). Separate interview guides were designed for the extension officers and the farmers with the aim to get the perspectives from each side.

To better understand the communication between the office workers of EDD and the local farmers, as well as the communication between me and all these respondents, the perspectives of Symbolic Interactionism helped me as a tool of interpretation. Symbolic Interactionism suggests that "to understand human action, we must focus on social interaction, human thinking, definition of the situation, the present, and the active nature of the human being" (Charon 2007, p.30). The EDD officers have their own views on the local farmers and vice versa.

Bureaucracy was the difficulty I faced during fieldwork but I overcame it by using a reference from my home university, Kostanay State University. It was difficult to contact the

⁴ See Appendix1

⁵ Extension Development Department

farmers and LLC Zarechnoe experimental station because at the time I didn't have any official reference or document stating that I was doing and that I was allowed to do the research work. Therefore, I had to apply for a help to my home university Kostanay State University, the Department of Science, to get contacts LLC Zarechnoe experimental station and the references to meet with the office workers of EDD and the farmers. I explained the purpose of my contact and requested them to give me an appointment for the interview in their convenient time. A total of six interviews were given. Two were informants working at the EDD of LLC Zarechnoe experimental station, and the remainders were the farmers with varying experience. The interviews were conducted in person and I also had the opportunity to observe a seminar organized by the department.

The interviews began with warm up questions inquiring about the daily routines of the actors. Following the warm up questions were more in-depth questions pertaining to the difficulties in communication with the farmer or workers of EDD, what kind of responsibilities they have in their work, etc. At the beginning of the conversations the farmers also asked me a lot of questions. For example, why I wanted to interview them specifically, if they would benefit from my findings, how my research could change the present situation. In this situation I had the opportunity to use the concept of non-violent communication, the objective of which is "not to change people and their behavior in order to get our way, it is to establish relationships based on honesty and empathy that will eventually fulfill everyone's needs" (Rosenberg, 2003:85). The conversation was kept in a very positive atmosphere with respect, understanding and appreciation. My aim was to make the interview friendly, easy, and interesting by showing concern for others rather than for personal interests. In the beginning of the conversation I introduced myself and explained the nature of my master program and talked my education in Sweden and why I did this study. The informants were very interested in the story and this helped me to motivate them to share information about their work. At the very beginning of the interviews I informed the respondent about time and topic of interview. But the interview often took more time than I expected because the respondent could not answer shortly to my question since they sometimes they did not understand the nature of the question and wanted to talk about their general problems, complain on the governmental policy or the financial situation in the country. The interviews with the office workers were done in Russian and the interviews with the farmers were taken in Kazakh language. Even as I am fluent in both languages taking interviews in different languages was quite challenging for me because in the same time I had to concentrate on understanding the answer, formulating follow up question and taking notes. For me it was not only an interview but also a conversation sharing feelings and experiences.

I got different experiences from the interviews. For example, the respondents didn't answer the questions in the same way. Some of them answered directly with much and interesting information and without any hesitation but others had to take more time to understand the question. The majority of the farmers didn't have an agricultural background. I realized, after the different conversations, that an interesting part of doing interviews was that it was a learning opportunity not only for me but for informants as well. Some of them told me that some of the questions were strange and confusing. For example, the questions about how the farmers perceive the EDD and their view on them were difficult to understand by some of the farmers.

I tried to build a trust worthy dialogue and used my own perceptions and knowledge I got from my courses such as Introduction to Environmental Communication, Facilitation in Project and Conflict Management, Communicative Strategy and Communicative Theory.

4. THEORETICAL CONCEPTS

In this section the theoretical concepts and models of environmental communication are presented in order to understand and analyze the communication process between the EDD officers and the farmers.

4.1 Symbolic Interactionism

In order to better understand the communication between the extension officers and farmers, as well as the communication between the extension officers and myself, as the researcher, it is appropriate to understand symbolic interactionism. For example, the officers have their own views on extension officers. To understand why they have these perspectives, it is necessary to know what perspectives are and how they are formed. Why do the farmers and the EDD officers act in different ways on the same issue? Why do the extension officers, farmers and I have different views on the situation? The perspectives of Symbolic Interactionism sees group life “as a process in which people, as they meet in their different situations, indicate lines of action to each other and interpret the indications made by others” (Blumer, 1998:52). Such indicated lines of behavior or action can take place not only between individuals but also between organizations and individuals, for example, in the communication process between the farmers of the Kostanay region and that of the EDD. Therefore, it is important to take into consideration symbolic interactionism in order to understand how symbols can shape our perspectives

“Perspectives are points of view – eyeglasses, sensitizer – that guides our perception of reality” (Charon, 2007:11). A perspective, formed by certain periods of interaction, is the individual’s own angle by which the human being can see the world through his eyes. We all have different perspectives which are influenced by our different experience and knowledge. “Perspectives influence and guide what we see and what we believe, then what we see and believe influence what we do” (Charon, 2007).

“Role taking is not the kind of mind action we engage in ..., but it is one of the most important; it is not only the only quality we use to understand others and to communicate clearly to others, but it is almost always central when we interact, learn, teach, and try to influence (Charon, 2007:111). The farmers will be able to understand the EDD officers’ point of view only if they reconstruct the reality and try to see it from their eyes. In order to have an effective communication, the EDD officers and the farmers should be honest and try to take each other’s roles. When the actors are not able to take the role of the other, misunderstandings occur. In the communication process between farmers and the EDD it is very important to establish a level of trust through the taking roles and keep the meta-communication which helps to develop the trustworthiness in the interaction. Meta-communication is the communication about communication, i.e., when the actors are able to mirror each other’s thoughts and emotions, confirming, rejecting or clarifying them. To give a meaning to the farmers’ and the extension officers’ perspectives I had to take a role of others. In the communication process between the local farmers and the EDD taking the role of other can lead to successful cooperation and bring progress in their relationship, if the actors are able to see the reality from each others’ eyes.

4.2 Communication models.

A number of models and theories have been developed to work with environmental communication. One such model is called a “classical communication” model which is widely spread and used. In all communication processes there are a sender and a receiver. In order to communicate with the receiver (i.e. with the farmers) the sender can use all means of media such as social nets, newspapers, radio, television, etc. The culture and environment can influence how the receiver reacts, and this reaction can lead to failure or success of the communication process. In order to investigate the communication process between the EDD officers and the local farmers the classical communication model should be taken into consideration.

The “classical” communication model below describes communication in terms of six main components: sender; message; channel; effect; and feedback (Nitsch, 2000:195).

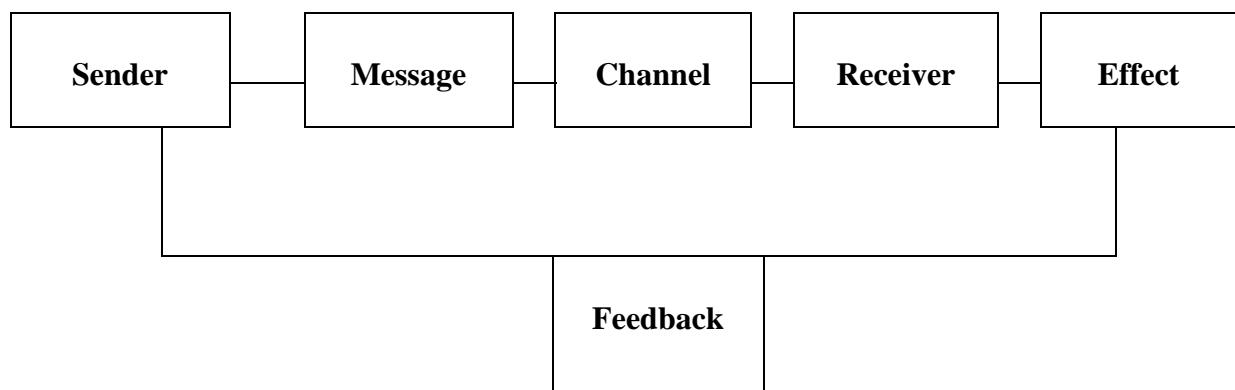


Figure 1: The classical communication model.

The sender can deliver a message without considering the receiver’s perspective. If the target group is influenced by the message and participate in the process, the communication may be effective. As described by Nitsch this means that “...communicators have to make the effort to change the perspective, i.e., learn how to look at the situation from the target group’s point of view and try to see it through their eyes” (Nitsch, 2000:205).

With the help of this model the sender has to listen to the receiver’s need and try to send the information considering the perspectives. “The relevance model is a communication model. It represents communication as an encounter or an exchange, between the sender and a target group that is actively seeking information” (Nitsch, 2000:205). According to this model to have a successful and good communication there should be some preconditions in the communication. The message (information) should be in accordance with the situation where the target group and the sender can meet each other’s expectations. As Nitsch (2000: 205) states: “the target group has to be able to see the relevance of that information from its own perspective”. In order to achieve an effect on the communication the information should be confirmed by the target group in terms of time, place, language and methods of sending the message. According to the relevance model (Figure 2), not only the internal factors of human action can influence the communication, but the external factors can affect and change the communication process as well.

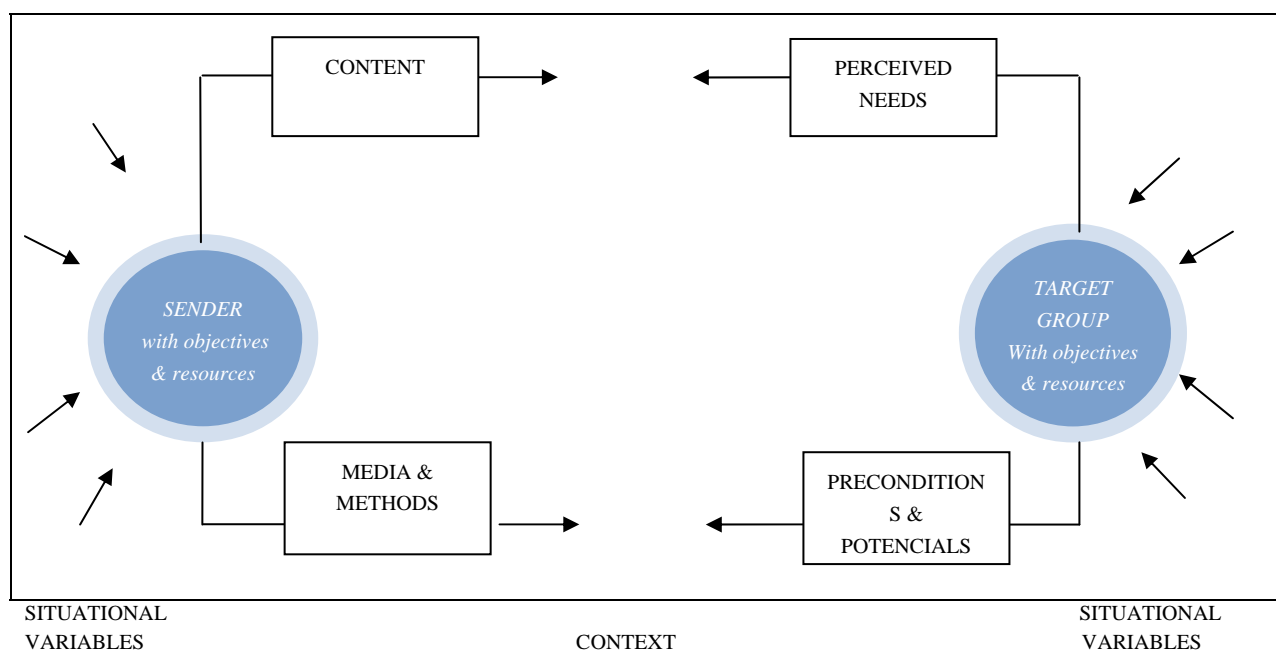


Figure 2: The relevance model describes communication as an encounter and an exchange between sender and information-seeking target group (Nitsch, 2000:206).

4.3 Extension

The agricultural extension is a process which requires the interaction of knowledge and experience. In most countries the extension is used as an instrument to achieve certain economical goals. According to Niels Röling(1988), “The role of extension is not only to ‘deliver’ technology, but also to develop human resources so as to empower people to exercise effective demand for appropriate service”. The communication process is considered to be a main instrument in implementing the extension program. Therefore, extension is a communication intervention which helps to find out the resolution of problems associated with the environment (Röling, 1988).

Many researchers have given the definition to the concept of agricultural extension:

“Extension is a service or system which assists farm people, through educational procedures, in improving farming methods and techniques, increasing production efficiency and income, bettering their levels of living, and lifting social and educational standards” (Mauder, 1973:3). An extension service enables farmers to improve their agricultural practice through knowledge, innovations and skills. With the help of extension service the farmers can increase their productivity and income and, reduce environmental problems in their fields.

“Extension is a professional communication intervention deployed by an institution to induce change in a voluntary behavior with a presumed public or collective utility”, (Röling, 1988:49). Extension service in agriculture is a key element for connecting the scientific research and field practices. “Extension is an ongoing process of getting useful information to people (communicative dimension) and then assisting those people to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to utilize effectively this information and technology (the educational dimension)”, (Swanson&Claar,1984:1).

In sustainable agriculture, extension is used to influence farmers' behavior so that they may become aware of opportunities for improvement. However, sustainable agriculture is sometime difficult to understand and apply for the farmers. That's why the farmers need more information and assistance from extensionists.

5. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Here I will explain the nature of the regional extension service and its goals. I will also show the results of six interviews with extension officers and farmers in the Kostanay region in Kazakhstan.

From the given results of interviews it is clear that there are a lot of problems in the communication process between the actors. The Extension program itself is in a developing stage. The Kostanay region is one of the biggest regions in the country. According to the data given by the EDD there are more than 6, 000 private farms in the region. As a result, the number of the extension departments is very insufficient in comparison with the number of small and large farm businesses in the region. This has lead to the fact that the EDD maintains the communication on an irregular basis with their target group.

From the EDD's point of view, the farmers are simple people and very open but at the same time are not active in the collaboration with the department. Most of the farmers from the remote districts are poor. From the EDD officers' perspective, the farmers always demand technical means or devices, and that the farmers believe the department, being a governmental department, should provide the agricultural inputs at an affordable price, or for free.

5.1 How the extension service is carried out in this region.

The dissemination of knowledge and the development of educational information and consulting activities are becoming an important tool for the development of innovations in agriculture, which provides the interaction of market and state organizations. In this regard, JSC KazAgroInnovation under the support of the MA⁶ of the Republic of Kazakhstan since 2009, has begun a project creating a system of sharing knowledge in the field of agriculture (Extension), focusing on improving the skills and knowledge of rural producers through the transfer of new knowledge and technologies, applied research, as well as practical application in the fields.

The distribution of the systems of knowledge in the agro-industrial complex covers a wide range of areas in education and training, consulting activities organized for the local farmers in rural areas through the involvement of specialists in different fields of the agricultural sector. The government tries to create a good platform for the development of the agricultural sector with the help of scientific innovations.

Since 2009 and up until the present, six big centers operate in Almaty, Akmola, Kostanay, Karaganda, South Kazakhstan and East Kazakhstan oblasts⁷. The most important task

⁶ The Ministry of Agriculture

⁷ Oblast is a type of administrative division in some post Soviet countries. Often translated as a "region", "area", "zone" or "province".

of these centers is to meet the needs of rural producers and the objectives of development of agricultural industries in the regions.

JSC KazAgroInnovation

Increasing and improving the efficiency of agricultural production and the competitiveness of its products in the international and domestic market, has been a major challenge. Currently, in the Republic of Kazakhstan there are more than 200,000 registered businesses operating in different sectors of agriculture, most of them are located in the south and south-eastern part of the country (JSC KazAgroInnovation, 2013). Therefore, the development of agricultural enterprises and the improvement of their effectiveness mostly depend on proper management of private farms, introduction of advanced agricultural technologies and science-based techniques.

Extension Development Department

The EDD has been created within JSC KazAgroInnovation. The main objectives of the department are to develop an agricultural extension system to ensure effective management of projects and programs to transfer knowledge, and to enhance the efficiency of agricultural training personnel. The department performs the following functions aimed at developing an agricultural extension system for Kazakhstan (JSC KazAgroInnovation, 2013):

- Preparation and participation in implementing systematic and institutional projects/programs;
- Coordination of activities of the Company (JSC KazAgroInnovation) and its subsidiaries;
- Monitoring and analysis;
- Training and participation in the implementation of projects/ programs on in agriculture;
- Monitoring the implementation of projects/programs of agricultural extension system;
- Coordination and cooperation with universities based on agricultural sciences to prepare agrarian staff.

Regional Extension Centres

The network of the six regional Extension Centres in Agriculture was established by JSC KazAgroInnovation, in 2009. The locations of the centres were determined by the presence of the scientific research institutes, which are also administered by JSC KazAgroInnovation. The centres organize field demonstrations of new technologies and equipment, keep track of the latest developments in agriculture, offer educational programs for farmers on specific agricultural topics, and organize national, regional and international conferences, seminars and roundtables on issues of agribusiness (KazAgroInn, 2013).

All centres are equipped with training facilities including, for example, conference rooms, lecture halls, libraries, demonstration sites, machinery and equipment, laboratories and hostels. The locations of the extension centres are as follows:

- Ushkonyr, located in Merey village, (22 km from Almaty);

- Shortandy, located in Shortandy village (60 km from the capital city Astana);
- Kostanay, located in Zarechny village, LLC “Zarechnoe experimental station”;
- Tassay, located in Tassay village;
- Balkhash, located in Almaty region;
- Maktaaral, located in Southern Kazakhstan (JSC KazAgroInnovation, 2013)

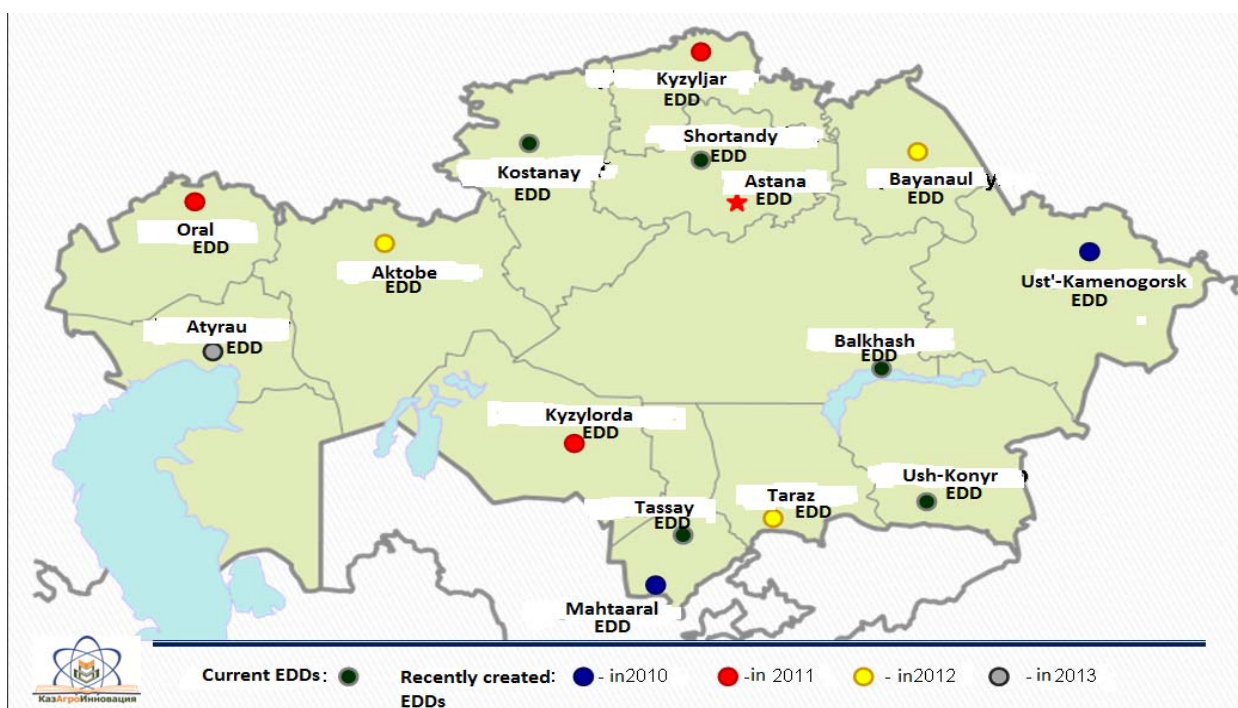


Figure 3: A map of distribution of Extension Departments in the country.

Source: <http://kai.gov.kz/extension/crz>

5.2 How the extension officers perceive their work.

According to the officers' opinion the farmers are dependent on traditional ways of farm management. In the opinion of the officer, the farmers are very passive and are not so interested in adopting innovations. The officers feel that the farmers sometimes think that the government must provide everything for free, like in the Soviet time. The extension officers think the attitude of farmers and their willingness new technologies depends on the age of the farmer. If we compare the farmers from the villages and the farmers from small towns the ages will be different. Nowadays the younger generation prefers to work away from the fields and live in big cities. The people migrate from villages to cities with the hope of improving their quality of life.

One of the most important problems in communication with farmers according to the officers' view is the difficulty in contacting them: “Each year our center gets the funding from JSC KazAgroInnovation and Ministry of Agriculture for the organization extension service in the oblast. Along with consultations and visiting the fields we organize the seminars. There are almost 6,000 farmers in the region. It is impossible for the organization to get in touch with every farmer and talk to them personally. The participation in the seminar is not obligatory. The

farmers come by their own and decide if it is necessary or not. At the end of the seminar each participant gets a certificate from the department. When we start a new set of seminar weeks we send out the newsletters for each district and post the advertisements in local TV channels and radios. The participant can call the department and register for the seminar”.

For more effective performance of the Extension service in the region, there is a consultation network on scientific and technological issues of agriculture that was created in 2010. The consultation service of agricultural management is based on:

- 1) Online advice related to agricultural topics.
- 2) Direct consultation with field visits.

One of the officers said that the farmers take a long time to decide to use the new technologies, such as, for example soil protective moisture or energy saving technologies. It was made obvious that people have different experiences and levels of education. Here is a quote from one of the officers describing perspective of how successful collaboration with farmers can be:

“Kostanay region is well known for its very good wheat production. The adopting of such innovations is strategically important for our oblast. Therefore, we want farmers to be advanced and to practice agriculture with less damage to the environment. Nevertheless, there are some farmers who have become very successful in their business during four years of our collaboration and they express their positive attitude”.

Another problem in the communication process is with the issue of misunderstanding and passiveness among the farmers. “When we send out the newsletter about coming seminars many farmers think that the participation will cost them money and it is just a waste of time. But we arrange seminars for free and even cover the expenses if he or she is traveling from far away districts. Along with newsletters, radio announcements, and TV advertisements, social networks sites (i.e. Facebook) have been created with information about the work of our center. But it is not that popular among the local farmer unfortunately” said one of the officers.

As it was mentioned above the extension centers were created recently in 2009. As one of the officers said: “It took a long time to build the extension system and to involve the farmers into the system of sharing knowledge and experience. We need more researchers with modern views on agriculture and officers with excellent professional competence.” Since most of the office workers have the background in agricultural sciences they do not have so much skill and knowledge in communication. Most of their communication skills are learned from their work with the farmers.

According to the opinion of the officer, due to attending the seminars organized by the department, the farmers have opportunities to develop their skills and contact each other: “Often in our seminars we meet the farmers from old ‘soviet schools’ who are from poor districts and most of them have never stayed away from their homes, let alone hotels, etc. We can pay the travel expenses and provide them with accommodation during the days of the seminars.” At the same time, the officer thinks that the department has failed in contacting the farmer on a regular basis: “At the end of a seminar each participant receives electronic books of the lectures,

brochures and certificates from our department. But we cannot control further implementation of the knowledge in real life”.

From the given results I better understood what the extension officers have in their mind in terms of the concepts of classical communication model but according to certain factors it is obvious that the relevance model is more applicable in the communication process between the EDD officers and the farmers.

The extension officers should take the role of farmers if they wish to cooperate with each other. The farmers and the EDD officers have to consider the communication process as a two-way process so that each side will be able to understand each other's perspective. “We do not simply react to words or acts of others; we also try to get into their heads and try to understand their words from their perspective” (Charon, 2007). The EDD officers complain that the farmers are very passive and slow with adapting to new farm management. In some cases, it might be true as it is connected with age matters of farmers, as the EDD officers mentioned, but my perception, as the researcher, is that farmers are not against adapting to new innovations. “People have the capacity for independent thought based on their individual values and experiences. We are all different and our choice and interpretation of information is influenced by our individual experiences” (Nitsch, 2000:193). The farmers have their own preferences of how to practice the agriculture in their fields based on their experiences and cultural traditions.

If the farmers are not able to adapt the new innovations the EDD officers should build the communication in a way that their farmers can see the relevance and importance of the new technology provided by the extension department. According to the classical communication model and the relevance model, if the target group (farmers) are able to understand and accept the message sent by the extension officers the farmers will look at the situation from their own perspectives. It means that the EDD officers should look at the situation from the farmer's perspective and see it through their eyes. It is important for the EDD officers to listen and pay attention to farmers' needs.

There is a top-down approach in the communication process between the EDD officers and the farmers. According to the classical communication model, the EDD officers (sender) provides the farmers (target group) with certain information about new technologies or methods to try and effect their communication process by sending out books, materials creating different internet resources and tries to receive feedback by visiting fields, arranging seminars, conferences, etc. But for the EDD officers it is difficult to attract or involve the farmers in their work. For example, the location and number of the department is not sufficient in comparison with the territory of the whole region and number of its private farms. It leads to the problem of internal communication and to some extent to economical problems. “Communication is also affected by cultural, economic and political variables” (Nitsch, 2000:205). As the relevance model shows the communication process can be influenced by the situational variables and in this case due to lack of internet connection and poor infrastructure in the villages it is difficult to get in touch with every farmer and deliver the information directly.

It is important to point out that the department has been created recently and probably the officers haven't built a strategy or instrument in communicating with the farmers. The lack of officers with excellent professional competence is also one of the barriers in communication with the farmers.

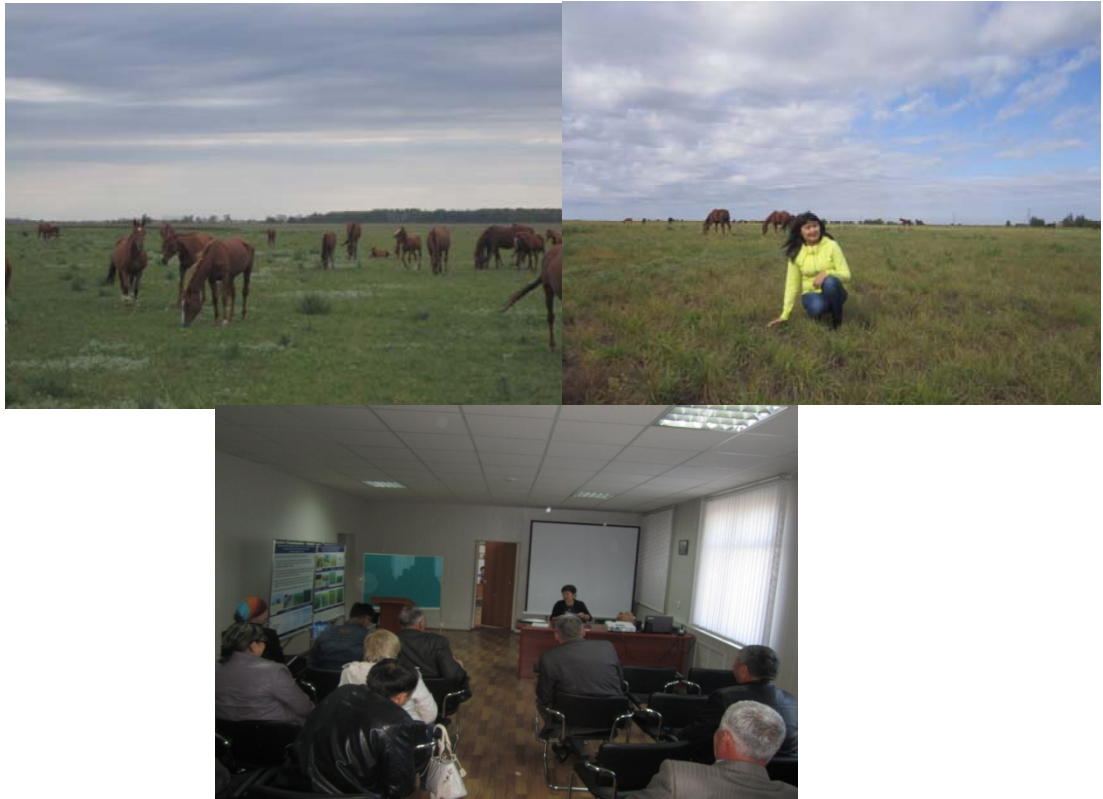


Photo: fieldwork, Zarechnyi village in Kostanay region. Photo: Gulmira Andirova, September, 2013.

5.3. How the farmers experience the extension service.

When I was at the department I met with farmers who came to participate in the seminar. I had the opportunity to talk with them and get my view on their relations with the Extension Department. One of the farmers was very disappointed with the extension service in the region. He came from a village very far away. The topic of the seminar was related to veterinary concerns, and the seminar was titled, the “Brucellosis of cattle”: “I am not a veterinarian, but I know better all about this disease. I thought the seminar would be more useful. I don't have to know the theory but I want to know how the department can help me to prevent my livestock from diseases”.

Another farmer, who had a negative attitude towards the extension service, felt it had become very difficult for him to run the farm. Year by year it is getting unprofitable due to the economic situation in the country with banks giving expensive loans with up to 27%- 30% interests: “Why the department can't help us to get loans?” The farmer was very disappointed with the extension service in the region: “I don't need all these ‘innovations’. I simply need help or consultation.”

Some of the farmer expressed their positive attitude towards the extension department but at the same time they were not happy with the whole system. He is from the city and has 400 ha of land. This farmer doesn't have agricultural education and has been running his business (wheat) since 1995. He is comparatively young and says that he tries to follow the different internet pages and magazine related to agriculture. The farmer was blaming the government that it is harvesting time but still nobody knows the price for the wheat. Each year the government lowers the prices for the harvest and the farmers can't cover all the expenses. The farmer works with the extension department on different issues and has started using moisture saving technology two years ago.

One of the farmers was very happy to introduce his farming to me. This farmer is considered to be very successful in the region, known for using advanced techniques and implementing new technologies in his field. This farmer has a veterinarian education and collaborates with the extension department very often. His farm is famous for its special kind of horses which is very expensive in the country: "Breeding horses is a very expensive and difficult business. It demands a lot of investment. However, it is very good that in our dependent time now we have opportunities to develop and build our own businesses".

I really enjoyed the interview process with the farmers. The farmers are very simple and open people. It was difficult in some moments to understand their answers as they always wanted to talk about their problems related to economics. I got to know that the farmers are not aware of the relevance model or any other efficient communication model. In spite of that the farmers are familiar with the work of EDD officers, and the farmers are not satisfied with the extension service in the region and think their needs are not taken into considerations. From analyzed results, it is clear that the extension officers do not have communication skills and probably they are on the way to create their own communication strategy in working with the farmers. As Ulrich Nitsch (2000:217) points out: "Knowing about context is sometimes the most important element of environmental communication".

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The main aim of this research work investigated how the communication process is performed between the Extension Development Department and the farmers of the Kostanay region. Based on the analysis of the interview results the EDD officers are using the theory of classical communication model in the communication process with the farmers.

The extension officers appear to not be adequately addressing the concerns and needs of the farmers. They are not successfully communicating with the farmers in their roles as extensionists. As it was obvious from the answer of one of the farmers who wasn't satisfied with the seminar topic and the way it was presented by the officer. The extension officers should be reaching out to the farmers before seminars are given to research what sort of topics the farmers

are concerned about and wish to be addressed at these meetings, rather than rely solely on the information circling inside the EDD department. The EDD officers failed to communicate with the farmers during the seminar. The extension officers should be very well qualified professionals and be competent in their field as they are key actors in communicating with the farmers.

The communication process is not following the relevance model as both content and form in information does not meet the needs and the expectations of the target group (farmers). The EDD officers consider the farmers very simple, rural people, and complain that the farmers are very passive and not willing to collaborate with the department. The EDD officers have built their own perspectives and perceptions towards the farmers according to their experience in communicating with the farmers.

The ways of how to improve the communication between the farmers and the EDD officers can be suggested from the interview results.

There is a need to change the extension officers and the farmers' behavior. In the officer's opinion the farmers are used to practicing their farms traditionally for many years without adapting to new innovations. Nitsch, (2000:193) points out that "The information we are exposed to affects our interpretation of the world and ourselves; how we feel, how we think, what we do." Through changing the farmers' behavior the EDD officers will be able to change the farmers' attitudes towards new innovation and technologies. When the farmers see the benefits of taking new methods and techniques provided by the EDD, the farmers will start to change their behavior. According to Nitsch (2000:205), "If a target group is to accept, to understand and use information, it has to be able to see the relevance of that information from its own perspective." The EDD should consider their target group and provide the material in accordance with relevance of the information.

There is a need to develop the human resources. According to the EDD officers' opinion the department hasn't built the strong communication strategy in contacting with the farmers. The Extension program has been implemented recently and it is an ongoing process. As one of the EDD officers said: "It took a long time to build the extension system and to involve the farmers into the system of sharing knowledge and experience. We need more researchers with modern views on agriculture and officers with excellent professional competence." The EDD officers should be provided with training from authorized organization within itself so they can improve their communication skills to perform a better communication with the farmers. U. Nitsch (2000:219) states that "working with environmental communication demands continually increasing competence in personal communication and process facilitation."

There is a need to develop infrastructure. According to the officers' opinion, developing the infrastructure is necessary to build an effective communication process with the farmers. As one of the EDD officer says: "Along with newsletters, radio announcements, and TV advertisements, social networks sites (i.e. Facebook) have been created with information about the work of our center. But it is not that popular among the local farmer unfortunately." The farmers are not interested in the information, not only because of their passive behavior or not

willing to collaborate with the department, but also because it connects with the economic problems within the country. The government should provide with better economic conditions for the far districts and bring the internet to every house in the villages so that all categories of farmers can show their interests to communicate with the EDD and gain more agricultural knowledge through internet pages or materials presented by the department.

7. REFLECTION

The challenge behind the data collection was due to a lack of information about extension policies in Kazakhstani agriculture since it has started comparatively recently after privatization reform. But I faced more problems with finding contacts with informants. The most difficult was to find the farmers since I did the fieldwork in September, 2013. It was a harvesting time and all the farmers were busy in their fields. However I was lucky, the EDD was conducting seminars with farmers during this time and that helped me get in contact with more farmers. But I should say I found contacts not only with help of EDD but also there was a meeting with person who doesn't have a connection with the department. So I believe it affected the outcomes of the interviews since the different perspectives were presented.

The extension officers, as well as the farmers, are so kind and nice people and I really appreciate that they have shared their experience with me. As it was mentioned previously that the extension program has started recently in the country it is still at the developing stage. Though the extension officers do not have enough experiences still they are willing to help me and answering questions honestly.

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9. APPENDIX 1.

Questions for the EDD officers:

- 1) Hello, what is your name? How is going your working day today?
- 2) How long have you been working at the department?
- 3) What kind of education do you have?
- 4) Could you tell me more about your work and responsibilities at the department, please?
- 5) How do you contact with the farmers usually? How do you communicate with them?
- 6) Do you think that there are problems in communication/contacting with the farmers?
- 7) Why do you think the communication fails with the farmers?
- 8) Could you tell me your perception or view on the farmers?
- 9) Do you think that there might be internal or external problems within your department that influence the communication with the farmers?
- 10) Do you have any suggestions on how to improve the communication process with the farmers?

Questions for the farmers:

- 1) Hello, what is your name? Could you tell me about yourself and your family, please?
- 2) What kind of farm do you have? What do you cultivate?
- 3) How long have you been engaged in agriculture?
- 4) What kind of educational qualification do you have?
- 5) Have you ever applied for a service to the Extension Development Department? How often do you communicate with the department officers?
- 6) Could you tell me some example of how you get the advisory service from the EDD?
- 7) What is your opinion about extension program?
- 8) How do you perceive the department officers? What is your view about their work?
- 9) Is it difficult to contact the department for you? What is the problem in communication do you think?
- 10) Do you have any questions for me?